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ABSTRACT

This teaching unit, designed for advanced high school students and average junior college students in a humanities oriented literature course, has one primary objective: to correlate similar thinking in two different time periods and locales. The philosophy of Taoism in ancient China and the philosophy of transcendentalism in nineteenth century America are examined and compared. The unit is divided into fifteen parts, each part representing one day of the unit; for each, that day's objectives as well as several teaching suggestions are given. The objectives include developing an awareness and appreciation of Chinese philosophy, translation problems in literature, and the writings of Walt Whitman, Lao Tse, Ralph Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau. Epigrams from these four authors are included in the handouts at the end of the document. (TS)

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TAOISM AND AMERICAN TRANSCENDENTALISM:

A Humanities Teaching Unit

Nancy Womack

Introduction

This teaching unit is designed for advanced high school students or average junior college students enrolled in a humanities oriented literature course. The primary objective of the unit is to correlate similar thinking in two completely different time periods and locales, namely ancient China, the philosophy of Taoism; and Nineteenth Century America, the philosophy of Transcendentalism. Authors to be studied include Lao Tse, Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman.

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First Day of Unit

Daily Objective: To introduce unit and make immediate and long range assignments.

1. Discuss objectives of unit.
2. Have individual students volunteer for the following oral reports:
   A. Laot'zu (Lao Tsu; Laotse; Lao Tse)
   B. Taoism
   C. Transcendentalism
   D. Ralph Waldo Emerson
   E. Henry David Thoreau
   F. Walt Whitman
   G. A boy and a girl to dramatize a scene from The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail. (Scene dealing with Transcendentalism -- pp. 34-38.)
3. Have students spend remainder of class period reading Handout # 1-- LIFE educational reprint # 81 on "The Faiths of China."

Second Day of Unit

Daily Objective: To provide library time for individuals

preparing oral reports, and reading time for other students to complete Handout # 1.

Third Day of Unit

Daily Objective: To develop an awareness of Chinese philosophy, and to discuss some of the Taoist concepts which will be used later in comparison with writings by other authors to be studied in this unit.

1. Oral report on Lao Tsu.
2. Oral report on Taoism.
3. TIME-LIFE film strip on "The Faiths of China."
4. Discussion of film strip and educational reprint.
   A. What are the basic principles of Taoism?
   B. How does Taoism differ from Confucianism?
5. Emphasize ideas which can later be related to transcendentalism.
   A. Simplification of life.
   B. Following one's instincts.
   C. Looking to nature for solace and harmony within oneself.
   D. Philosophical attitude toward death. (See

supplementary explanation from Waley--below)

Taoist View of Death

From The Way and its Power
By Arthur Waley (p. 54).

". . . in death no strange new fate befalls us. In the beginning we lack not life only, but form. Not form only, but spirit. We are blent in the one great featureless, indistinguishable mass. Then a time came when the mass evolved spirit, spirit evolved form, form evolved life. And now life in its turn has evolved death. For not nature only but man's being has its seasons, its sequence of spring and autumn, summer and winter. If someone is tired and has gone to lie down, we do not pursue him with shouting and bawling. She whom I have lost has lain down to sleep for a while in the Great Inner Room. To break in upon her rest with the noise of lamentation would but show that I knew nothing of nature's Sovereign Law."*

This attitude towards death . . . is but part of a general attitude towards the universal laws of nature, which is one not merely of resignation nor even of acquiescence, but a lyrical, almost ecstatic acceptance . . .

To be in harmony with, not in rebellion against the fundamental laws of the universe is the first step, then, on the way to Tao.

---

* Quoting from Chuang Tzŭ XVIII. 2.

Fourth Day of Unit

Daily Objectives: 1. To read selections from the Tao Te Ching as a means of becoming further aware of Taoist philosophy.

2. To instill an awareness of the "translation problem" in relation to literature written originally in a different language.

1. Handout # 2: Selections from the Tao Te Ching, Chapters I, IX, XIV, XXIX, and XXXIII translated by Arthur Waley. Read and discuss using Waley's interpretations in The Power of the Way as a basis for discussion.
2. Handout # 3: Two different translations of Chapter XXXIII; one by Lin Yutang and one by Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English. Compare these with Waley's translation of the same selection. Emphasize the difficulty involved in translating literature of this nature.
3. Handout # 4: Chapter XXXI--Weapons of Evil. Discuss Taoist philosophy of pacificism.

Fifth Day of Unit

Daily Objective: To introduce Transcendentalism as compared with Taoism.

1. Oral report on Transcendentalism.
2. Dramatization of scene from The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail.
3. Brief discussion of Transcendental philosophy.
4. Writing assignment comparing at least three aspects of Taoism and Transcendentalism.

Sixth Day of Unit

Daily Objective: To provide reading time for selections to be studied during the second week of the unit.

1. "Self Reliance" by Emerson
2. Excerpts from Walden and "Civil Disobedience"

Seventh Day of Unit

Daily Objective: To view and discuss the film strip (Concord: A Nation's Conscience." (Any other good audio visual introduction to Emerson and Thoreau could substitute.)

Discussion questions for suggested film strip:

1. Emerson was concerned with several aspects of society. What were some of them?
2. What would you say was Emerson's basic philosophy?
3. If Emerson were alive today, what things in our society do you think might disturb him and why?

4. What was Thoreau's definition of a philosopher? How did he apply this definition to his own life?
5. In what way did Concord play an important part in the lives of both Emerson and Thoreau?
6. How were Emerson's and Thoreau's ideas and philosophies similar? How were they different?
7. What aspects of their philosophies can you compare with the Taoist principles we discussed last week?

Eighth Day of Unit

Daily Objective: 1. To develop further awareness of Emerson as a person.
2. To discuss "Self Reliance" in relation to Emerson's philosophy.

1. Oral report of Emerson's biography.
2. Go over main points of "Self Reliance." Use discussion questions in text.

Ninth Day of Unit

Daily Objectives: 1. To become more aware of Thoreau as a person.
2. To read and discuss selections from Walden and "Civil Disobedience." (Compare Thoreau's pacificism

with Lao Tsu's.)

1. Oral report on Thoreau.
2. Discuss text book selections from Thoreau.

Tenth Day of Unit

Daily Objective: To view and react to the film strip/record "The Three Fold Gospel of Walden Pond," produced by Thomas Klise.

1. View Film Strip.
2. Write short papers reacting to the presentation.

Eleventh Day of Unit

Daily Objective: To provide reading day time for students to read assignments for the week.

Text book selections from Whitman.

Handout #5.

Twelfth Day of Unit

Daily Objectives:
1. To develop an awareness of Whitman.
2. To discuss selections from Whitman.
3. To compare Whitman's attitude toward death with the Taoist view.

1. Oral report on Whitman.
2. Discuss reading selections:

a. "When Lilacs Last in the Door Yard Bloom'd"

b. Selections from "Song of Myself" (Handout # 5)

3. Compare Whitman's view of death with Taoist view. (See supplementary sheet # 1).

Thirteenth Day of Unit

Daily Objectives: 1. To discuss the epigramatic writing styles of the authors studied in this unit, particularly Lao Tse, Emerson and Thoreau.

2. To provide each student with opportunity for oral expression.

1. Distribute handout of epigrams. (See following pages)
2. Have each student select one epigram to read and comment on.

Fourteenth Day of Unit

Daily Objective: To provide time for writing assignment.

Students will select one of the following topics for composition:

1. Select one epigram from yesterday's handout and expand it into an essay.
2. Write an essay dealing with at least one specific aspect of Taoism or Transcendentalism which you can incorporate into your own philosophy of life.

"WORDS TO LIVE BY"

Epigrams from Lao Tse: Tao Te Ching
Translated by Lin Yutang

In managing human affairs, there is no better rule than to be sparing.

Who is rich in virtue is like a child.

He who knows others is learned; he who knows himself is wise.

There is no greater curse than the lack of contentment.

The farther one pursues knowledge, the less one knows.

Deal with a thing before it is there. Check disorder before it is rife.

Rule a big country as you would fry small fish.

Who is firmly established is not easily shaken.

Cultivated in the individual, virtue will become genuine.

Reveal thy Simple Self,
Embrace thy Original Nature,
Check thy selfishness,
Curtail thy desires.

In light frivolity, the Center is lost;
In hasty action, self-mastery is lost.

He who has not enough faith will not be able to command faith from others.

When the people of the Earth all know beauty as beauty, there arises (the recognition of) ugliness.

The violent man shall die a violent death.

Epigrams from Emerson

Nothing can bring you peace but yourself.

To live without duties is obscene.

A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature.

The only reward of virtue is virtue; the only way to have a friend is to be one.

Every sweet has its sour; every evil, its good.

The true test of civilization is not the census, or the size of its cities, nor the crops--no, but the kind of man the country turns out.

Criticism should not be querelous and wasting, all knife and root puller, but guiding, instructive, inspiring, a south wind, not an east wind.

For everything you have missed, you have gained something else; and for everything you gain, you lose something.

A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him, I may think out loud.

Nature and books belong to the eyes that see them.

The only gift is a portion of thyself.

Epigrams from Thoreau

To see the sun rise or go down every day, so to relate ourselves to a unidersal fact, would preserve us sane forever.

The value of a man is not his skin, that we should touch him.

A man thinking or working is always alone, let him be where he will. Solitude is not measured by miles of space that entervene between a man and his fellows.

In accumulating property for ourselves or our posterity, in founding a family or a state, or acquiring fame even, we are mortal; but in dealing with truth we are immortal, and need fear no change or accident.

Most men have learned to read to serve a paltry convenience, as they have learned to cipher in order to keep accounts and not be cheated in trade; but of reading as a noble intellectual exercise they know little or nothing.

A written word is the choicest of relics. It is something at once more intimate with us and more universal than any other work of art. It is the work of art nearest to life itself.

To be awake is to be alive.

I think that there is nothing, not even crime, more opposed to poetry, to philosophy, ay, to life itself, than this incessant business.

A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone.

Time is but a stream I go a fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away but eternity remains.

There can be no melancholy to him who lives in the midst of nature and has his senses still.

If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.

In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty, poverty, nor

weakness, weakness... If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.

Fifteenth Day of Unit

Daily Objective: Read aloud essays from preceding day. Make comments on essays as a means of summarizing and concluding unit.

HANDOUT # 2

Selections from the Tao Te Ching
Translated by Arthur Waley

Chapter I

The Way that can be told of is not an Unvarying Way;
The names that can be named are not unvarying names;
It was from the Nameless that Heaven and Earth sprang;
The named is but the mother that rears the ten thousand
creatures, each after its kind.
Truly, 'Only he that rids himself forever of desire can
see the Secret Essences';
He that has never rid himself of desire can see only
the Outcomes.
These two things issued from the same mould, but never-
theless are different in name.
The ' same mould' we can but call the Mystery,
Or rather the 'Darker than any Mystery',
The Doorway whence issued all Secret Essences.

Chapter IX

Stretch a bow to the very full,
And you will wish you had stopped in time;
Temper a sword-edge to its very sharpest,
And you will find it soon grows dull.
When bronze and jade fill your hall
It can no longer be guarded.
Wealth and place breed insolence
That brings ruin in its train.
When your work is done, then withdraw!
Such is Heaven's Way.

Chapter XIV

Because the eye gazes but can catch no glimpse of it,

It is called elusive.

Because the ear listens but cannot hear it,

It is called the rarefied.

Because the hand feels for it but cannot find it,

It is called the infinitesimal.

These three, because they cannot be further scrutinized,

Blend into one.

Its rising brings no light;

Its sinking, no darkness.

Endless the series of things without name

On the way back to where there is nothing.

They are called shapless shapes;

Forms without form;

Are called vague semblances.

Go towards them, and you can see no front;

Go after them, and you see no rear.

Yet by seizing on the Way that was

You can ride the things that are now.

For to know what once there was, in the Beginning,

This is called the essence of the Way.

HANDOUT # 2 (Cont'd)

Chapter XXIX

Those that would gain what is under heaven by tampering
with it--I have seen that they do not succeed.
For that which is under heaven is like a holy
vessel, dangerous to tamper with.
Those that tamper with it, harm it.
Those that grab at it, lose it.
For among the creatures of the world some go in front,
come follow;
Some blow hot when others would be blowing cold.
Some are feeling vigorous just when others are worn out.
Some are loading just when others would be tilting out.
Therefore the Sage 'discards the absolute, the all-inclusive,
the extreme'.

Chapter XXXIII

To understand others is to have knowledge;

To understand oneself is to be illumined.

To conquer others needs strength;

To conquer oneself is harder still.

To be content with what one has is to be rich.

He that works through violence may get his way;

But only what stays in its place

Can endure.

When one dies one is not lost; there is no other longevity.

HANDOUT # 3

Chapter XXXIII
Translated by Lin Yutang

He who knows others is learned;

He who knows himself is wise.

He who conquers others has power of muscles;

He who conquers himself is strong.

He who is contented is rich.

He who is determined has strength of will.

He who does not lose his center endures,

He who dies yet (his power) remains has long life.

Chapter XXXIII
Translated by Gia-Fu Feng
and Jane English

Knowing others is wisdom;

Knowing the self is enlightenment.

Mastering others requires force;

Mastering the self needs strength.

He who knows he has enough is rich.

Perserverance is a sign of will power.

He who stays where he is endures

To die but not to perish is to be eternally present.

HANDOUT # 4

Chapter XXXI
Weapons of Evil
Translated by Lin Yutang

Of all things, soldiers are instruments of evil,

Hated by men.

Therefore the religious man (possessed of Tao) avoids them.

The gentleman favors the left in civilian life,

But on military occasions favors the right.[1]

Soldiers are weapons of evil.

They are not the weapons of the gentleman.

When the use of soldiers cannot be helped,

The best policy is calm restraint.

Even in victory, there is no beauty,

And who calls it beautiful

Is one who delights in slaughter.

He who delights in slaughter

Will not succeed in his ambition to rule the world.

. . . .

[1]These are ceremonial arrangements. The left is a symbol of good omen, the creative; the right is a symbol of bad omen, the destructive.

HANDOUT # 5

Selections from Walt Whitman

. . . .

I wish I could translate the hints about the dead young men and women,
And the hints about old men, and mothers, and the off-spring taken
soon out of their laps.

What do you think has become of the young and old men?
And what do you think has become of the women and children?

They are alive and well somewhere,
The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,
And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait a the
end to arrest it,
And ceas'd the moment life appear'd.

All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,
And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier.

from "Song of Myself" #6

The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains of my
gab and my loitering.

I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.

The last scud of day holds back for me,
It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the shadow'd
wilds,
It coxes me to the vapor and the dusk.

I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.

HANDOUT # 5 (Cont'd)

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fibre your blood.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you.

"Song of Myself" # 52